ABSTRACT

“Suburb and Spring: An Architectural History of Two American Towns, 1893–1918”
Jim Ralph and Kathryn Morse; March 2018

This thesis analyzes how two towns in the New York metropolitan fringe—Montclair, New Jersey, and Saratoga Springs, New York—expressed the City Beautiful movement in built form. At the turn of the twentieth century, urbanization and technological improvement led to changes in the physical infrastructure of metropolitan regions. Railroads and trolleys led to new patterns of movement and settlement, as well as consumption and leisure. Waves of non-English-speaking immigrants into cities stirred sentiments of nativism, even in towns which saw no increase in foreign-born population. New ideas of architecture and urban planning emerged, including the City Beautiful, which followed the spirit of progressive reform sweeping American society.

Residents of these towns experienced modernity as contradiction. Their architecture appealed to an idealized bucolic past while embracing certain aspects of downtown urbanism. Both towns developed a cohesive rural–urban identity: Montclair developed as a “country town,” while Saratoga became the “city in the country.” While these identities functioned as mechanisms of local civic pride, they also aligned with a national effort to define America for the new century. Some citizens took up the cause of City Beautiful themselves, joining civic groups to perform street beautification. Others saw the movement as a chance to give their towns a mythic purpose. Ultimately, this story suggests that the embrace of the City Beautiful in the modern age did not only occur in metropolitan centers; it also occurred in smaller towns, which were physically separate from cities but nevertheless defined by them.

Sources include:
Archives at Montclair Free Public Library. Montclair, New Jersey.
Archives at Montclair Historical Society. Montclair, New Jersey.
Archives at Saratoga Springs Public Library. Saratoga Springs, New York.

I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this thesis. —Ethan Brady